

Hayabusa didn't grab asteroid sample after all

Just 11 days after celebrating the world's first collection of a piece of asteroid, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) has had to take back its words. On 7 December, JAXA announced that the Hayabusa spacecraft apparently failed, after all, to pick up a sample from the asteroid Itokawa.

Newly retrieved data suggest that the probe may not have fired the two pellets that were supposed to pulverize Itokawa's surface and allow fragments to be collected. Jun'ichiro Kawaguchi, the project manager, said that a safety system might have accidentally switched on and prevented the probe from firing the pellets.

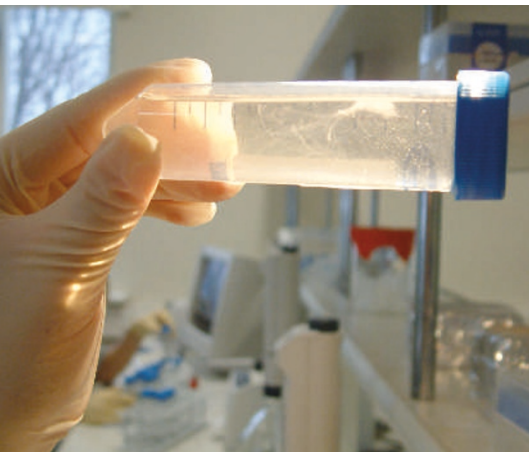
Hayabusa is also having serious engine trouble that affects its power and attitude control. Nevertheless, JAXA still hopes to get the troubled probe back to Earth in 2007.

Cash infusion saves Estonian gene bank

The Estonian government has decided to bail out the tiny eastern European country's ambitious gene-bank project.

The Estonian Genome Project, founded in 2001, aims eventually to collect and bank blood samples from most of its 1.4 million citizens, together with medical and lifestyle data. When venture-capital funding for the scheme dried up last year, after only 10,000 blood donors had joined up, the project was left treading water.

The government now plans to inject €8 million (US\$9.5 million) into the project over the next four years, enough to raise the number of donors to 100,000. This size would make the gene bank a serious player in population genetics, where scientists study the complex interplay of genes and environment underlying common diseases such as high blood pressure and depression.



Give a little bit of yourself: the government hopes every Estonian will eventually be in its gene bank.

Norwegian children's not-so-mad scientists

Goodbye, Dr Frankenstein. Kids these days have a more multifaceted image of scientists, according to some of their pictures.

A decade ago, when the Research Council of Norway's youth club held an art competition for children aged 5 to 15, most of the pictures of scientists were of the stereotypical mad variety, complete with dishevelled hair and test tubes. And they were all men.

In this year's competition, though, scientists were drawn excavating dinosaur bones, in outer space and studying whales underwater. Of the hundreds of drawings submitted, 30% were of female scientists.



The council's Marianne Løken says she hopes the drawings reflect more realistic views of scientists, but cautions that the study is just an informal glimpse of children's attitudes.

Australian law could force nuclear dump on territory

Australia has moved closer to selecting a permanent site for the nation's first nuclear waste dump. On 8 December, the Australian government passed legislation allowing the facility to be built at one of three sites in the Northern Territory.

The decision has angered local communities and indigenous people's groups, and follows years of wrangling between federal and state governments over where to put the site. State political pressure killed an earlier proposal to house the facility in South Australia. The new federal legislation will overrule any opposition from the Northern Territory government.

The site will serve as a repository for nuclear waste from agencies such as the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation, which runs the country's only nuclear reactor near Sydney. Australia's nuclear waste is currently stored in universities, hospitals and research facilities across the country.

At last India joins the nuclear-fusion club

India has joined the multi-billion-dollar nuclear-fusion experiment ITER, becoming the seventh member of the consortium.

ITER's participants — the United States, the European Union, Russia, Japan, South Korea and China — made the decision to admit India on 6 December during a meeting in South Korea. The offer comes nearly two years after India's request to join.

ITER aims to demonstrate the feasibility of controlled self-sustaining nuclear fusion

as an energy source. The main ITER facility will be built in Cadarache, France, and all ITER partners will participate in its construction, development and research.

Prizewinning homeopathy research is withdrawn

A pharmacologist at the University of Leipzig in Germany has admitted errors in a study claiming that a form of homeopathy worked. The errors, described in a university statement, include missing control experiments and an incomplete statistical analysis.

Karen Nieber was the lead author on a study that claimed that a homeopathic dilution of the drug atropine could relax cramps of gut muscles in rats (K. Nieber *et al. Biologische Medizin* 32–37; February 2004). Before the work was published, it won a homeopathy research prize.

Nieber says that she has since retracted the paper and plans to pay back her share of the €10,000 (US\$11,900) prize. The university began investigating the work after other researchers pointed out suspected flaws.

Correction

Of the 11 cell lines described in Hwang *et al.* (W. S. Hwang *et al. Science* 308, 1777–1783; 2005) mentioned in our News story "TV tests call into question cloner's stem-cell success" (*Nature* 438, 718; 2005), it was originally claimed that seven could divide into different cell types, a figure subsequently revised down to three in a formal correction. And the text specifying the contribution of Gerald Schatten and his colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh was amended during routine copy-editing between the paper being posted online in May and its appearance in print in June.